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ABSTRACT

This developmental paper generally describes a task oriented model for teaching about conflict and conflict resolution, using student groups for problem solving, which can be developed in the classroom. The model involves: 1) identification of the issue, topic, or problem by the entire class; 2) identification of ideas, concepts, or facets of conflict by sub-groups; and, 3) generalization. The merits of this method include: 1) students learning to work together; 2) active participation in concept and idea development; 3) demonstration of conflict and resolution within the group process itself; and, 4) student motivation. Almost any type of problematic or conflict situation can be used that are simulations or real in the individual, the classroom, the school, the community, and larger groups. Current issues with practical implications which directly impinge on the student are especially useful. Specific techniques are briefly described: case study method; classroom negotiation; individual exercises in the perception of conflict; observation of nursery school age children; historical literature and clinical cases; video-tape for feedback purposes; and, role playing simulations such as the Prisoner's Dilemma or Black and White. (Author/SBE)

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CURRICULUM ON CONFLICT: SOME SUGGESTIONS

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(David N. Daniels, M.D. June 1971)

General Considerations

An understanding of group dynamics or process is crucial to the teaching about conflict. A task oriented model using student groups for problem solving can be developed in the classroom which can be used as a basic paradigm for dealing with conflict and which provides a framework for teaching about conflict and its resolution. The steps in the task group model are:

(1) A class as a whole defines the issue, topic, or problem under consideration, e.g., the issue introduced could be what are the dimensions of conflict.

(2) The class is divided into sug-groups of approximately 5 students with each sub-group responsible to solve the task at hand as best he can in a limited period of time. For the regular classroom hour this is approximately 15-20 minutes.

(3) The task groups go through a by-phasic process of problem solving.

(a) each sub-group first goes through an idea expansion (brain storming) phase, e.g., the members list as many factors or facits of conflict as they can. Each sub-group has completely free reign in doing this brain storming for about one-half of the allotted time. Then (b) each sub-group goes through an idea contraction phase, e.g., members make a more careful formulation by specifying what the key factors in conflict are and possibly putting these factors in some kind of sequence or order of priority. One member of each sub-group records ideas or concepts that his group is generating. Using a large piece of butcher type paper and felt pen is often practical because later each sub-groups ideas can be taped to a wall. At the end of the 15-20 minute task session each sub-group picks a spokesman to review its findings or contributions. If butcher paper or large newsprint paper was used each group can tape its findings to the wall for comparative purposes.

(4) The teacher then guides the reporting phase comparing the similarities and differences among the various sub-groups' accomplishments and attempts to build a preliminary composite of all the thinking and key ideas. At this point the degree

of cooperation or competition, leadership, and ability of the sub-groups to work together constructively can be assessed and often should be.

(5) The teacher can assign one member from each sub-group to construct a final composite as a homework assignment for distribution to the class the next day or he himself can construct this composite.

The merits of this method are: (1) Students learn to work together as task groups; (2) students participate in concept and idea development; (3) conflict development and resolution often can be demonstrated during the task group process itself; and (4) students frequently become highly motivated through the competetive element and involvement inherent to sub-grouping.

At many points during a unit on conflict the elements in conflict development and resolution can be analyzed. The origins or antecedents can be examined, the conflict(s) can be determined, the signals and factors leading to recognition of the conflict, and the outcome or effects can be demonstrated. Thus the formation of task groups can be used repeatedly in problem solving and demonstrating conflict and its resolution. In addition, it is possible for the teacher to rate or have students rate group performance (see attached meeting evaluation sheet).

Almost any type of problematic or conflict situation can be used in teaching about conflict and conflict resolution. Both simulations and real situations in the individual, the classroom, the school, the community, and larger groups can be used. Here and now situations with practical implications, issues which impinge directly upon the student are especially useful.

Specific Techniques

Use of the case study method. Students can be formed into "commissions" or action oriented project teams to diagnose and make recommendations for a variety of current social issue problems. The diagnostic study aspect could involve literature review, surveys, field study, or investigation, and interviews. Project teams can come up with a variety of solutions and alternative action plans. Almost any controversial issue can be studied, e.g., education, mental health, criminal

justice, population, pollution, problems of the aged, etc. The case study method often can be used as a semester project with the class divided into several sub-groups. Findings can be presented to appropriate administrative or elected officials. Issue selection should be as current and relevant to the student as possible. Hence community and school issues often prove most useful.

The use of negotiations. Practice at negotiating solutions to situations demanding compromise and the stress of change are particularly useful in teaching about conflict. Here a particularly interesting technique is to take a problem in which there is fairly strong feeling and form several negotiation teams from within the class. For example, a class of thirty could be divided into three negotiating teams with 5 on each side of the three teams. A set amount of time of 20-30 minutes in a regular classroom hour is allotted to the negotiations. The team with the first agreed upon solution can be declared the "winner". In negotiating the resolution of a conflict, individuals or sub-groups can be assigned to both sides of an issue or asked to switch sides of an issue and present the opposite point of view. *

Use of individual exercises in the perception of conflict. There are a number of valuable techniques to engage the student in identifying conflict situations both within himself and working as an individual. First, the student can keep a log or diary for one or more days in which every time he feels angry (or frustrated) he stops and tries to identify what the precipitating or antecedent factors in his feeling of anger were, what the frustrating situation at hand was, and what his response to this frustrating experience was. This exercise is often an enlightening self-discovery that some real frustration or blockage of one's plans occurred which produced conflict and elicited an angry response and effort to overcome the obstacle sometimes through attacking it. Second, the students in the classroom situation can be asked to record the last time they had a fight and

* At each step of any specific issue or problem where a student group is trying to deal with a conflict situation, the teacher can intervene to point out the emotions that occur, the stereotyping, the projecting, the identifying with "my side as the right one", etc. That is, the teacher can point out aspects of the process whatever the content issue at hand might be.

similarly indicating the conditions that led up to this fight. The types of situations can be described in vignette form categorized and enacted as demonstrations. Third, students can be asked to watch specific T.V. programs that present problematic situations, e.g., the news, detective stories, westerns of the Gunsmoke variety, and family or situational shows. They can be asked as a homework assignment to identify conflict issues that occurred and what strategies were undertaken to solve them. Particular attention should be given to violent versus non-violent methods. Fourth, students can be given the assignment of going through the newspaper one night and simply cataloguing and categorizing all types of conflict situations that appeared in the paper. The situations can be grouped and a frequency count made of various types of conflicts appearing in the newspaper.

Use of observations with younger children. Observing nursery school age children to identify naturally occurring conflicts can be especially valuable since often the reactions of these younger children are simpler and the issues therefore much clearer. Field visits to nursery schools to observe naturally occurring conflict or strife can be augmented by contriving conflicts, e.g., providing one highly desirable toy and observing the subsequent behaviors. Again the students can be asked to identify the conflict issue at hand, how it got initiated, what the responses seem to be, and what types of solutions were employed. Also high school students can be used to help teach younger children about conflict or dilemma situations using, for example, the Shaftel materials.

Use of historical examples. Literature, clinical cases, for example the tape-recorded murder reported in Violence and the Struggle for Existence, and examination of the factors leading to war or riots can be used. One technique here is to remove data identifying the parties to a conflict. For example, cards with statements made by the English and the Colonists in the Revolutionary War or by the United States and North Vietnam in the Vietnam War could be sorted by students in an effort to show how similar the views of both sides actually are. Even when

identifying data is not removed, the similarities in viewpoint concerning "the enemy" are often strikingly similar.

Use of simulations. There are an endless variety of simulations that can be conducted in the classroom setting which cover the entire range of conflict situations. Here only several techniques and examples will be mentioned: (a) the Prisoner's Dilemma simulation can be useful particularly when it is built up from the individual competition level to the group level. The Prisoner's Dilemma is an exercise involving a competetive versus cooperative solution to a simple problem. It is particularly useful in building from a two-person simulation to a between-group simulation involving an entire class. Among other things the Prisoner's Dilemma demonstrates the win at all costs phenomenom and issues concerning trust versus mistrust. (b) exercises in discrimination or prejudice can be designed in which students are assigned roles for one to several days in class in which they are directly discriminated against, that is not allowed to talk, not allowed to be seated until last, not allowed to leave the room until last, etc. (c) any situations reported by students in association with Item 3 above can be utilized as simulations.* (d) directed exercises (role enactment or role playing) can be utilized effectively in teaching about conflict. The basic techniques here are really quite simple. Students can be asked to define and enact a variety of roles. Student directors and switching between observor and participant roles helps keep class involvement. The two basic teachniques involve simple role enactment and role reversal. Students can be asked to enact alternate solutions including actual ones and ideal solutions. A special technique here is to use present and future oriented solutions. Students can be asked to use "the future autobiography" technique wherein they are asked to go forward into the future various time periods and enact or conceive of the consequences of a particular conflict. This helps bring the future into the psychological present. Observers

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* A library or catalogue of various simulations can be built up over time demonstrating various types of conflict.

can be asked to make formal ratings and comment upon the way in which conflict emerged, developed, and was resolved. (e) a variety of games demonstrating conflict are available commercially. The black-white game produced by Psychology Today is but one example. (f) the so-called allocation exercise demonstrates the process of establishing conflict and the problems associated with resolving it once individuals or parties have become identified with a specific position. In the allocation issue, a specific amount of resources usually in the terms of funds available can be allocated in several different ways. Individual students or groups of students are given, for example, five ways in which a special fund can be used by a community or by a school board. The students or groups of students are then asked to present the particular use of funds to which they are assigned. In the school board allocation issue (an already available example), a special allocation of $100,000.00 can be used to improve library services, acquire teaching machines, improve bus services, augment teacher salaries, etc. After the participants have become involved with a particular way of utilizing funds, the group is asked to come together to reach agreement on what way to use the monies. This results in a very exciting and dramatic example of conflict and efforts at its resolution. Obviously a whole variety of issues could be used in the allocation exercises ranging from the international to the community level. Furthermore, the allocation technique powerfully demonstrates the abilities of individuals or groups to negotiate and to get stuck into one's particular stance and the difficulty in relinquishing it. And (g) another useful technique is the selection exercise. Students are asked to select among several choices and then asked to represent their choice in a larger group. For example, the choices could be between three alternative plans of action or the selection for promotion of three alternative teachers. Once the individual has made his choice he is asked to come to agreement with a larger group of students and in turn the larger group meets with another larger group to attempt to reach a consensus on the choices represented.

Use of the video-tape. Many of the foregoing exercises and examples can be video-taped and played back to demonstrate conflict. The video-tape is especially useful in helping the individual and/or group see himself or themselves as they come across to others. Since stop action and replay can be employed, the various components of conflict can be sorted out and discussed. The video-tape is particularly useful in simulations involving role enactment of one kind or another.

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